

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 1A

BALTIMORE SUN  
20 May 1985

# U.S. builds up to standstill in Europe

By Charles W. Corddry  
Sun Staff Correspondent

HEIDELBERG, West Germany — Pfc. Andrew Miller of Cincinnati guns his 60-ton M-1 Abrams tank across a muddy field near Wurzburg as if it were a Mercedes on the autobahn — confident there is nothing as maneuverable on the other side of the East German-Czechoslovakian border 80 miles away.

At Bitburg Air Base, an F-15 streaks out of its blast-proof shelter at the sound of the klaxon, and in less than five minutes Lt. Col. John Lauher, a squadron commander, has the jet fighter off the runway, climbing out of sight.

These are ordinary scenes in the American Army and Air Forces in Europe as the Reagan administration's trillion-dollar military buildup accelerates the forces' modernization and combat readiness.

U.S. peacetime forces on the continent and in England have prospered in the past five years as never before, ranking in Washington's attention, with the strategic nuclear forces and naval power.

But Soviet forces have similarly prospered, by all accounts of intelligence analysts, and serious questions remain as to whether the West has gained or has run hard to stand still.

This, in turn, leaves open the persisting question of whether all the effort has raised the nuclear threshold — has increased conventional military power so that early recourse to nuclear weapons would not be necessary in case of attack. On the other hand, what might the situation have been had there been no buildup?

Answers to such speculative questions will decide for many whether the European defense improvement has been worth the money. It has, in any case, been substantial.

New weapons, from F-16 supersonic fighters to artillery-scattered anti-tank mines, from laser-guided bombs to multiple rocket launchers, have poured in. Spare parts bins are filling. Construction and renovation of military facilities are booming.

The Air Force has just started its own "Federal Express," using 18 commuter airline-type C-23 Sherpa planes to ferry engines and critical parts among its bases and reduce repair times for expensive jets.

War reserves of food, fuel, ammunition and vehicles are building up, though they are still below the goal of a 30-day stock of all items. The Air Force has 75 percent of needs that seem to keep expanding. The Army says it has a 30-day ammunition supply, but war reserves in general are still below desired levels.

Big checks have been written to update intelligence-gathering of all kinds on Soviet forces, and to make even more improbable a surprise attack. These advances, including automated collection and rapid distribution of data on Soviet forces, are among the most significant that have been made.

And what intelligence has found, Army and Air Force analysts say, is that Moscow has modernized virtually all elements of its forces facing Western Europe in its own buildup over the past five years.

Have the United States and its allies been running just to stand still?

"I believe that that's in fact true," says Gen. Glenn K. Otis, Army commander in Europe, with headquarters here in Heidelberg. "I think that's the generally accepted scenario. . . . What we have done is prevented the gap from growing too much. . . . They haven't attacked."

U.S. Army Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, commander of all American and allied forces in Europe, must view prospects not only from the standpoint of U.S. improvements but of those made by the other North Atlantic Treaty countries.

If there were an attack today, General Rogers says, "I would have no option but to request [presidential] release of nuclear weapons fairly quickly."

But, sounding more optimistic than heretofore in his three two-year terms, he says developments now are in train that will indeed raise the nuclear threshold and increase war deterrence.

These include: NATO-wide commitment to multibillion-dollar improvements in protection of aircraft on the ground; priority attention to expanding conventional ammunition stocks; new U.S. TR-1 surveillance planes that can "see" deep into enemy territory, and various new weapons for attacking Soviet reinforcements before they can reach the frontlines.

"It's not all gloom and doom in our business," General Rogers says. His "bottom line" on American forces is that "our operational capability has improved significantly."

The Reagan administration mostly gets the credit for the continuing European buildup. A lot, however, must also go to previous administrations.

President Reagan came to office when the Army and Air Force had developed full panoplies of new armored vehicles, aircraft and other weapons, waiting only for the larger orders that would send them to the field in needed numbers and with adequate spare parts. Under the new administration, these orders came in abundance.

So, too, did pay raises — 40 percent since 1981 — and a sense of presidential and public support for military men and women. Enlistments soared, and produced troops that commanders here and at Air Force headquarters at Ramstein Air Base call the best they've seen in long careers.

The quality of military people is "just unbelievably high," said Gen. Charles L. Donnelly, Jr., Air Force commander, whose squadrons operate from eight European countries. "As a result, I think, we're doing things smarter. We're maintaining aircraft better, because we have highly technically qualified people and they don't make the mistakes."